

# “Enlightened Development: Making Capitalism Inclusive”

## GSI Forum on Development and Civil Society

23rd - 24th February 2007



The GSI Forum on Development and Civil Society convened public deliberations that highlighted Baba Virsa Singh's landmark work and commitment to overcoming poverty. The roundtable discussions, on the 23rd, brought leading thinkers, academicians, policy makers and workers from Russia and India together in a cross-cultural dialogue marked by the contribution of Dr. Naresh Singh, one of the world's foremost experts on poverty reduction. Naresh currently serves as Executive Director of UNDP's High Level Commission for the Legal Empowerment of the Poor. He took his inspiration from Babaji 14 years ago, almost to the day, when he was introduced to him while on route to India, a story he shared with the audience. Following the roundtable sessions, participants gathered for a private audience with Babaji where questions ranged from the future of civilization and the earth, to the status of women.



The 24th session was open to the public and Gobind Sadan's auditorium was full to listen to Babaji and the participants share their findings. Participants and guests were treated to a sumptuous buffet on the lawn outside the auditorium, and then were equally filled intellectually and spiritually by the speakers who followed. As a follow up to the forum, Naresh Singh visited Shiv Sadan, Babaji's model farm on the banks of the Ganges in U.P. to observe the progress. He stopped to meet with the villagers from the surrounding area who shared how Babaji was responsible for bringing them out of poverty and met local press to share his program and thoughts on Babaji's work.. Forum participants are holding ongoing discussions throughout this year to develop some unique models for including the poor in the development process. We expect to be able to share our results by early next year.



# Enlightened Development: Making Capitalism Inclusive



Baba Virsa Singh's words were sharp: "There is no such thing as poverty. It is man made. It has no basis – no roots. Get rid of it. Share with those in need."

When speaking of development, Babaji encouraged everyone to first develop his own consciousness. "Everything must start with meditation. Without meditation you won't be able to realize what is happening in the world, you won't perceive the spiritual power, (dharam) within you, and you won't even understand your own nature." Babaji attributed poverty to two causes: "those who

have don't share and the poor don't work. Provided the opportunity to work, the poor will lift themselves out of poverty, and it is our responsibility to share our resources so they can."

"Everyone is talking about getting rid of poverty. The whole world is crying let's get rid of poverty but poverty still exists. Every country puts forth their own representative, all organizations put forward their own speakers, but poverty continues unabated. So let's understand that poverty does not really exist. With full faith, I want you to realize this.

I am not from a rich family. I came from a very poor family where we never had enough to eat. But I made up my mind that I should not beg from anyone. I thought, 'Let's get up and work. Share with the people and feed yourself.' Now I can tell you that I have a surplus of everything. And everything I have is for the people. We organize medical camps, bring the Doctors, provide food, and I go and preach for the uplift of those in need.

## We Will Rid the World of Poverty

I want you too to feel that you can get rid of poverty. And we will from today make a commitment to rid the world of poverty. People may well ask, "how can you go into such an area or country?" Go everywhere, but maintain your program. I want to share something with you. Raise yourself so high that God comes and asks, 'What can I do for you? What do you need?' Why run after people?

I have full faith that one day the current conditions will change and you yourselves will see a change in the world. This is his mission, and mine. Naresh never sleeps because it is his mission to rid the world of poverty. Even in his dreams he is thinking about this. And one day it will happen because God wants poverty to be eliminated. God will listen to your prayers."

Dr. Surjit Jolly – Principal, SPM College, Delhi University, Secretary, Gobind Sadan Institute  
Perhaps one of Babaji's greatest hallmarks is that he gives love to each and every person – to him there is no rich or poor, high or low, whether a government official or a gardener a professor or a farmer he greets them with the same love and respect and offers his blessings freely. While he has no formal education he quotes freely from all scriptures. He communicates with his crops and land as he shows concern for his devotees. He stresses hard work, trust in oneself, and the Almighty. He is respected by leaders from all sectors of society.



Sri Moti Lal Vora – Treasurer, Indian National Congress Party, Former Governor of U.P.

We want to thank Baba Virsa Singh for his vast contribution to the development of our nation. His shining example and teachings have shown us how to overcome both the scourge of poverty and religious conflict that have stood in the way of our progress. We as a nation have always and will always commit to carrying on the charge of our founding fathers to make our country inclusive in all aspects of life.

# Enlightened Development: Making Capitalism Inclusive

## Opening and Welcome

Ralph Singh – Convener

We are gathered here to reverse the downward spiral so we can deserve the title of humanity. Whatever equation we consider to solve the problems of civilization, fails when we inject the variable of human nature. In order to develop we must first learn to change the human consciousness. That is why we have come to the feet of perhaps the greatest Master on the subject, Baba Virsa Singh. He has literally spent his whole life teaching people how to develop, personally and spiritually, and to show society how to reclaim its sense of dharma, what the west has called – civil society. He teaches people how to bring those values along in their quest for progress. It is Babaji, who has demonstrated throughout his life how to combine values with work. He is the visionary for development, he provides the vision for a civil society.



### Excerpts from Naresh Singh's Keynote address

In coming to Baba Virsa Singh 14 years ago, what little I have learned along the way is that we become mere instruments for a higher energy that works through us to make change that we desire to have. I've learnt that it is not I or we who are the agents of that change, but rather we are the vessels and the channels through which that change is made.



In my work on poverty, I have brought environment and poverty together, and you can guess what the source of that work is. So, when we are talking about sustainable livelihoods we are talking about how the poor can get out of poverty without damaging the environment or the ecosystems in which they live. (If you want to work to help the world get rid of poverty then) we should not be focusing so much on the needs of the poor, because I believe that is a disempowering thing to do. I believe that we must begin with the assets around us. If you look at Babaji's work He looks at what assets are there and then He transforms those assets into people's prosperity. That somehow became the cornerstone of my own work, the assets approach to poverty. Begin with what they have so they become partners in the process rather than they being the dependant and you the donor. You must look at policy through the eyes of the poor. Those who make policy are in one arena, and those who work with poor people at the community level are in another.

The real problem of poverty is one of power. Economic and social deprivation merely result from skewed power relations where a very small proportion have power, and the vast majority do not have any control over the forces of their lives. But nobody wants to talk about that.

The problem is not money. The world is full of that. The problem is the political will to change the power relations between the poor, those who do not have, and those who have. So our work focused on how to use the power of the law, how to use the ideals of human rights and begin to think in concrete ways of how the poor can use the law to get themselves out of poverty.

When you look at the history of human civilization you will find that those who have power have never given power willingly to those who do not have. They always had to take that power. Either the poor will take power by violent revolution or we will have to find a peaceful way in which we will change those power relations. I'm not preaching any kind of revolution, but I am trying to teach a form of transformation. And I am using the guidance and the strength that Babaji directs my way.

"In my international development career, when working with the poor to help them get out of poverty I have always started with what they had rather with what they needed. I called it the assets approach as distinct from the needs approach. It is an approach in which the poor learn to take greater control over their own lives rather than wait for someone else to help them. It is a self-empowerment approach. The work is worship approach pioneered by Babaji at Gobind Sadan is the spiritual soul mate of my work. Together they offer a powerful framework in which to think about inclusive capitalism or making capitalism work for the poor. My transition to this type of thinking was certainly though subtly influenced through my first encounter with Babaji 14 years ago."

## Enlightened Development: Making Capitalism Inclusive

**Svetlana Smirnova** – Deputy, State Duma (Russian Parliament), Committee on Federation and Regional Affairs, Member PACE

We need legislation which includes all people. Currently it only covers the needs of a few. Business provides great opportunities but only for selective groups. People must be able to provide for themselves. We need to raise public awareness that we have all the resources at our disposal if only we would use them effectively. People still think that the government will provide for them. Youth in particular, have lost the ethic to provide for themselves. Currently they have no goals. They need a vision of the Russia of the future in which they will play a major role.



The poor need jobs so that they can earn their own bread. Today, as our respected Maharaji has said, there are many people in Russia who do not want to work. They have lost the skills of work. Their faith should be renewed so they understand that only they themselves are able to change their lives. Of course, the state must help and society should discuss these questions, but each one of us got an answer from Maharaji that if we want to change anything around us, first of all we should change ourselves. "Change yourself, do your best in order you can be changed, and once you've changed yourself, you will be able to change the world around you"

**Yuriy Ageshin** – Pro-Rector Russian School of Private Law, Coordinator "The New Country," public movement.



Whenever I come with many problems or questions and meet the great Master all problems disappear. I come within his aura and answers come automatically. I find peace and am able to go on with work. The world needs spiritual directions, which we have found at Gobind Sadan. Here we find what is missing in Russia in our grey everyday life. Politics without spiritual culture is an aggressive force. Globalization is marching unabated. The key to building a future must be ethical thoughts. The ideology of today will only lead to our destruction. We are funding an anti-culture, those things that destroy the fabric of society. We must no doubt get rid of poverty. But poverty is not an isolated problem. If we solve the problems from a

spiritual perspective and transform human consciousness, then we will receive the wisdom to solve all our problems. Babaji's teachings are the real mechanism of transformation.

**Dr. Andrei Bielyaninov** – Economist and Minister of Customs and Excise, Russian Federation

There are too many poor while a few are getting rich. The world is flooded with money. It has no value, either material or spiritual. Poverty still exists because the government doesn't know what to do with this wealth. The rich also forget that material wealth is given to be skillfully shared with others. When they forget this, God takes their wealth away. The world always experiences some kind of transformation, things that can bring evil, suffering, and tears to the earth. Russia has gone through such a transformation. Now we must learn to live with capitalism, and find ways to make our future happy.



What I say now is the challenge for all those in power. We must develop programs to overcome poverty but we should not give gifts. If someone simply gives people money that they have not worked for they will be crushed by wealth which comes on their heads. Every rouble, every dollar, every rupee should be earned. Only then will we find a way out of poverty to joy.



Sri Ashok Singhal, International President, Vishwa Hindu Parisad, takes blessings

## Enlightened Development: Making Capitalism Inclusive



**Bibek Debroy** – noted economist, Contributing Editor, the Indian Express, and Professor with the International Management Institute

Poverty is not an urban issue. It is fundamentally a rural issue. If one wants to look at the worst excesses of poverty in India it is in the rural sector, in the agriculture sector. No country has dealt with development while insuring that a significant sector of the population continues to earn a living out of agriculture. India's solution has been to pull people out of classic agricultural activities, production of food grains, and get them to work on non-agricultural, commercial activities. This is wrong. The poor's patterns of consumption rarely threaten the sustainability of the planet in any sense. The poor are far more entrepreneurial than most corporations. But when we talk of property rights, the poor don't exist as legal entities. Even the markets are biased

against the poor. The poor are capable of lifting themselves out of poverty if we remove the policy constraints.

**Dhanbir Singh Bains** – I.A.S – Senior Bureaucrat, Gov't of Punjab, Fmr. Chair, Markfed

Socially conscious multi-nationals, such as Nestle's, can play a significant role in uplifting the rural poor and improving the environment. Their track record has shown that farmers in their system have increased not only their income, but also have adopted better animal husbandry and agricultural practices. Babaji's focus on rural development is right. He takes spirit of God and works with his hands. We must upgrade the agricultural sector if we are to solve the problems of poverty and grow as a nation. We have placed too much emphasis on financial development. In Punjab, we have poisoned the soil and the water. It is time to correct the balance



**Ranjit Singh Kalha** – Member, National Human Rights Commission, fmr. Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs

The majority (72%) of our population lives below the poverty line, which is defined as a monthly income of rs.211 in rural areas and rs.450 in urban areas. More importantly, 75% of the poor reside in rural areas. So any meaningful discussion of property rights for the poor must therefore be focused on land ownership. Unless we improve the rural conditions then it will be difficult to exercise any laws regarding property rights. The average holdings of the poor are only 1 ½ acres. That is not enough to support a family.

Moreover, there is the overall anomaly that 75% of the economy depends on agriculture yet agriculture only contributes 25% of GDP. And to make matters worse, growth in the agricultural sector has fallen from a high of 4.8% to 2.2% per yr. Compared with the fast pace of industry and services, agriculture is stagnant at best. With small land holdings, how can we create sustainable agriculture and rural housing? Without any remunerative pricing, we will be only limiting our discussion to urban areas. While the government has introduced various schemes, we are barely scratching the surface.

**Tarun Tejpal** – Noted author and Publisher, "Tehelka, The People's Paper"

As a journalist it is our responsibility to give voice to the poor. But, the majority of the media ignore the 800 million. Media must be the social conscience of society. It has the power to wield moral suasion. But today what is touted by media as being in the public good often ignores the needs of those at the bottom of society. Rather it reflects the needs of those who hold the power and money. We owe it to the public and the nation to maintain a sense idealism and continue to be creative in our reporting and in our solutions



# Enlightened Development: Making Capitalism Inclusive

**Vladimir Zakharov** – Chair, Committee on Ecological Security, People’s Chamber of Russia, one of the world’s leading environmentalists, Human behavior has to change. We can not first develop economically and only later take care of social development. We need to increase the value of nature and the value of man, not in rubles or dollars but in our souls and minds. This is crucial for Russia, India, and the globe. As people gain wealth in Russia they are not helping others. So to overcome poverty, we need not just technological progress and economic development but we need to pay special attention to cultural and spiritual development as well.



People ask, “Is it dangerous to continue our development? Will we have an environmental catastrophe? I laugh – we are already there. It’s not global warming or global cooling. We’ve destroyed the balance in the biosphere. Future generations will consider us poor examples who think we are close to a crisis when we are already there. The key question now is how can we avoid cultural disasters?”



**Kim Shillin** – Chief of Oriental Cultures, Moscow State University

“Aristotelian philosophy has acted against the growth of the human spirit. We must include the spirituality as the key ingredient in all our thinking. India and Russia are trying to draw upon their traditions. Babaji helps us overcome our weaknesses and take the Name of God into the new world of freedom. Man must understand himself as both a child of God and co-creator with God. This is critical to the future of our world.”

**Dr. Ruslan Khayrullin** – Professor of Social Education (Indigenous Peoples) Russian State Social University

“To my mind it will be more productive to change the paradigms in our discussion about poverty. Let us think of people as spiritual and creative, instead of rich and poor. This way we automatically break down the image of people differentiated only by their economic status. Next, we can focus on changing the behavior of the rich. As Baba Virsa Singh has said, those with money have a responsibility to help those in need.”



**Veena Sharma** – Chair, Prajna Foundation

Teach the rich the value of sharing and make the poor youth catalysts of change. We try to make the rich uncomfortable. We go into schools and make the wall between the rich and poor porous. We found that well to do youth do want to share but don’t know how. Babaji hard work, self-esteem, and sharing provides a great model. When we started in the Basti, the youth did not feel they could change. Slowly some started to realize that they could improve themselves and get reasonably good jobs. They became mentors for others. They were catalysts of change and nurtured a sense of responsibility. On a micro level we can see the transformation beginning.



**D.S. Brar**, Chairman, GVK Biosciences, fmr. CEO, Ranbaxy, Member, Central Board of Directors Reserve Bank of India, Long time devotee of Babaji, and Forum advisor.

# Enlightened Development: Making Capitalism Inclusive



**Tarlochan Singh** – M.P. Rajya Sabha, Fmr. Chair, National Commission for Minorities  
What Babaji has accomplished in teaching meditation and bringing everyone together to demonstrate the equality of humanity, and bringing all religions together in one place is a great work. Now you are focusing the world, especially India and Russia on the scourge of poverty. This is such an enormous contribution to the legacy of Guru Nanak. You have given practical shape to his teachings. Langar (community kitchen) was created so that the concept of rich and poor could be overcome. You have demonstrated how to work hard, thank God, and share with those in need. This is a very happy day.

**Dr. Olga Shlykova** – Head, Communications Dept., Moscow State University  
Our work in education is to develop the spirituality of our youth. Are we really living in a democratic society and exercising the principles of civilization? In the midst of democracy the number of TV stations have been drastically reduced. How will help this spread democracy? Even if we have more media, will we give equal access to the poor, will their voice be heard and what should they do. We must talk of spiritual poverty and allow our youth to participate in creative activities solve these problems.



**Akhtar Ul Wasey** – Dean, School of Humanities and Languages, Dept of Islamic Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia University  
Religion must be separate from the state but religious values can not be separated from the public life. Our youth are becoming more secular than in a socialist society. Most important for our democracy to progress, voting must be compulsory in order to insure everyone's role in the process. Democracy itself is not a new concept for us. The spirit of democracy has existed in the Panchayat system for thousands of years. It's a way of life that demands commitment in actions, thoughts, and deeds. There must be accommodation for everyone. The word pluralism means a guarantee

for everyone to practice according to his tradition and to preach. A true secular democracy can not be disturbed by any internal or external forces.

**Dr. Ronki Ram** – Professor of Political Science, Punjab University, and Dalit rights advocate

We must not only look how the economy is doing. We must see how the poor are doing to measure the progress of the nation. Let us be clear as to how we define poor and look to bring them into the mainstream. Others are benefiting from programs meant for the poor. Political thinkers, such as Dr. Ambedkar, looked to make democracy inclusive, but the poor are still asking, "Where is our share of the pie?" The poor need participation, not patronizing. We must eliminate these social discrepancies which create a double standard in our society.



**Rais R Atnagulov** – President Int'l Assoc of Charitable Funds for Protection of Family, Motherhood and Childhood

On behalf of the Mothers of the world, I feel that women are the future source and force for peace in the world.

"In 2004 Maharaji together with his delegation were in Russia. He had a meeting with deputies of the State Duma, with Luzhkov, the mayor of Moscow, and I am sure that the fact of the better and faster development of economy in Russia, happened due to Maharaji as well. Because Maharaji helped to many people who met him for the first time, to think if the way we are living today is really the right way." Svetlana Smirnova, Deputy State Duma

# Enlightened Development: Making Capitalism Inclusive



## “There should be no poverty”

*“Poverty is not a permanent state. There is no such class or nation we can call ‘the poor’. Work hard and thank God and He will lift you out of poverty. This is my own personal experience. World policies are wrong.”* For the past 40 years, Baba Virsa Singh has repeatedly transformed barren land into productive farms to show how, through hard work and God’s blessings, poverty can be eradicated. Despite his great spiritual prowess, he at heart considers himself a farmer.



**Kuldip Nayar** – Eminent Journalist, fmr. Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha)  
We have the power to put a man on the moon, but we have also the power to destroy the world. How we use our power and learn to control our minds is the key to our future development. If in the process of our growth we harm another individual or country then that should not be deemed progress. Our means must be humane otherwise our ends can not be. If our path to our goals leads through a pool of blood, then we should not take that

path. Ultimately, power must be felt by each individual so they may rise out of poverty. We can not assess our economic progress without keeping the poor in mind. India’s sense of tolerance is the glue that holds the society together. If we have survived and will continue to survive as a pluralistic country, it is essential that we maintain these values which Babaji stresses and has demonstrated throughout his life and here in Gobind Sadan.



**Larisa Trunina** – Editor-in-chief "The Bulletin of HTPP" Business journal reading letter from **Iosef Kabzon**, Chairman, Cultural Committee, Duma and beloved Russian singer My Dear Baba Virsa Singh and Dear Friends,

It is very important that this forum focuses on the question of the interaction between religion and cultural development in society. It is especially important because the issues include all aspects and all classes of society including the poor. Modern humanity is under pressure from social, economic, and ecological crises but the main problem is a spiritual crises. The modern material consumer society has reached its limit. Now it is time to combine all aspects of spiritual culture to stand against these destructive forces

and help people overcome the ensuing crises by harmoniously combining science, religion, and culture, based on the ideals of truth and beauty, and responsibility for humanity and to God.

This approach provides all people with optimistic possibilities for the future. In addition, the spiritual approach to solving the problems combines the forces of all our religions which is very important for the growth and stability not just for any state but for the whole world. Let us remember the famous Indian philosopher, Swami Vivekananda, stated that Russia will take the lead the whole world towards progress and light but India will show the way.

### Concluding Remarks :

Enlightened Development is not simply a value proposition in a business sense but a “values proposition.” Development will not work if we ignore the spiritual poverty that breeds human conflict, within our minds, our families and our society. It will take a clear and visible commitment to remedy what has become the greatest debt on the world’s collective balance sheet. We can no longer afford poverty. It is up to us who sit around this table and many more like us around the world to send poverty into the annals of history and allow the people we now call the poor to graduate from the underclass and become productive world citizens. This is Baba Virsa Singh’s vision and the practical result of his life’s work. Ralph Singh

### Contact Address:

Gobind Sadan, Gadaipur, Via Mehrauli, New Delhi - 110030 India

General Office: 91-11-26802937, 26802251 Institute: 26805446, 26809608

Website – [www.gobindsadan.org](http://www.gobindsadan.org) [www.gobindsadan-rus.info](http://www.gobindsadan-rus.info) Email – [gsi@gobindsadan.org](mailto:gsi@gobindsadan.org)

For more information contact

Ralph Singh 91-9818255713, [ralph@gobindsadan.org](mailto:ralph@gobindsadan.org) or Mary 9910240049, [marypfisher@gmail.com](mailto:marypfisher@gmail.com)